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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA TO SUPPORT IAEA REFERRAL OF IRAN TO UNSC

Classified By: Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead for reason 1.5(d).

¶1. (C) President Mahinda Rajapaksa called the Ambassador early February 2 to tell him that the cabinet had decided the night before to support the U.S. position on Iran and the IAEA by voting in the February 2 IAEA Board of Governors meeting to refer the issue to the United Nations Security Council. Rajapaksa commented that in doing so, he was "loing a friend." The Ambassador assured the Presidet he was "joining a crowd" and expressed appreciation for Sri Lanka's support and understanding of how difficult a decision this had been given Sri Lanka's dependence on concessional oil imports from Iran. The Ambassador subsequently confirmed Sri Lanka's intentions with Foreign Secretary Palihakkara who noted that the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister has been in town quietly lobbying the GSL in the opposite direction.

¶2. (C) Comment. This very welcome news is the result of a long diplomatic effort, from the Secretary's discussions with Foreign Minister Samaraweera in Washington to U/S Burns' conversations during his visit to Colombo in late January, reinforced by our efforts. It is also a welcome indication that, early in his tenure, President Rajapaksa values the relationship with the U.S. and does not shy away from tough decisions.
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